Science And Humanities: Re-Humanising Mankind

The comparison of Frankenstein by Mary Shelley and Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf by Edward Albee, allows us to explore the seemingly irreconcilable relationship between science and the humanities. In Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, scientist Victor Frankenstein, in an attempt at originality, brings the dead to life and creates something perceivably inhumane and monstrous. The monster desires to be accepted, to be human, and pursues this yearning through the exploration of literature. George and Nick in Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf teach history and biology respectively. Nick is modern and dynamic, while George seems to fear change, taking to traditional norms surrounding arts and culture instead. In these texts, science, which represents progress and forwardness, seems to inevitably impede on that which makes us human. The humanities, though originally seen as the lesser of the two, are left to restore and rectify in the wake of mismanaged science.

Science is presented as a powerful tool for creation and progress. In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf , Nick is perceived to be at the forefront of genetics, in creating the perfect man. He is " the wave of the future" (Albee 68; Act 1), representing all that is "smooth, blond, and right at the middleweight limit" (Albee 66; Act 1), where "propensity for various diseases will be gone, longevity assured" (Albee 65; Act 1). Science is seen to be a filter for the imperfect, with new advancements allowing for the creation of a novel, healthy and impurity-free civilisation. This thread of originality also runs in the mind of Victor in Frankenstein, who attempts to "pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers" (Shelley 28) through manipulating dead body parts and creating life. The limitlessness of science enables Victor to acquire breakthroughs that have never been achieved, nor imagined, before.

In comparison to science, humanities, such as history and literature, are seen as less important. George in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, is seen by his wife, Martha, as less desirable than Nick, with one of the reasons being their differences in profession. In contrast to Nick's modern discipline, which is "right at the meat of things" (Albee 63; Act 1), George and his history is "abstruse" (Albee 63; Act 1). Martha's diction suggests that to her, biology is a central and critical subject, while history is obscure and unimportant. Likewise, science also seems to take precedence over literature in Frankenstein. While science is only for the academic and educated, such as Victor, literature is a discipline that is available to the masses, and even to the monster. There is a sense of elitism and great labour attached to Victor's ambitions, which allows him the advantage of creation and control over the monster.

The powerful nature of science, however, requires one to manage it with great discernment. If not, it could lead to dire consequences for mankind. George's profound fear of advancement in genetics, is derived from the perception that ridding the world of imperfections would be synonymous to removing that which makes us "human". George posits that in a "perfect" world where "all imbalances (are) corrected" (Albee 65; Act 1), mankind loses the differences, the special nuances that allows every individual to be their own. While George fears the removal of human characteristics, Victor creates a similar threat to mankind by producing something debatably inhuman. As suggested by the opening line of the novel, this "evil foreboding" (Shelley 1) of Victor does eventually result in a heartbreaking series of lost lives. Victor's unnatural and uncanny creation wreaks havoc in his personal life by killing his brother, his

brother, best friend, and soon-to-be wife. As such, science, when used outside the boundaries of humanity, proves to be detrimental and unforgiving.

Ultimately, the humanities proves to be a lasting force: one that restores, rectifies, and re-humanises mankind. In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Albee posits that the humanities is more powerful than science, and its strength lies in making us human. As the play progresses, Nick fails and falters while George acquires a strong and eloquent voice. The lack and powerlessness of science is revealed in Nick's impotency. On the other hand, through various impassioned speeches, Albee emphasises the endurance of George's "preoccupation with history" (Albee 49; Act 1). History, in all its "glorious variety and unpredictability" (Albee 67; Act 1) is presented to be a persevering force in light of science's "race of glorious men" (Albee 66; Act 1). Albee's repetition of "glorious" allows us to make a direct comparison of these two disciplines, where science is sterile, while humanities allow for humans to be human - each one imperfect, each one different from the other.

Likewise, Frankenstein's monster is introduced to the essential human qualities of empathy, emotions and language through literature. Through the classic works of literature, Lives, Werther, and Paradise Lost, the monster acquires the "perce(ption) that the words (the authors) spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness" (Shelley 78). In its yearning to be treated as a human, it pursues language and comprehension of human emotion, and literature leads him to experience "an infinity of new images and feelings" (Shelley 91). The effects of its exposure to literature and language are apparent later in the novel, where a blind man regards it as a "human creature" (Shelley 96) and Victor seems to express compassion for it, puzzled that the monster's "words had a strange effect upon (him)" (Shelley 106). The monster's manipulation of language made it seem human to others, even Victor, who vehemently objected to this idea. This illustrates the power of the humanities: it is able to humanise, even amidst the crudest consequences of science.

These texts present as complementary: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf in a time of caution and preparation for the advancement of science, and Frankenstein in the aftermath of the exploitation of it. In both of these texts, the authors contemplate the value of science and humanities, and how they interact with one another. Although they are often perceived to be two distinct disciplines, we see that really, they are interacting forces: science pushes the boundaries of mankind, while the humanities keep it reigned in and under control. Both are equally important to progress, each lacking without the other.